



# Calligraphy Magic

How to Create  
Lettering, Knotwork,  
Coloring & More



Carí Buziak

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# Introduction

Calligraphy is a fun craft to learn, as well as a useful one. Far from being an obsolete skill, more and more people today are picking up the pen and creating their own greeting cards, wedding invitations, fine art projects, and even creating their own computer fonts!

In the old days, calligraphy tools were unique and specifically crafted to their task. Today, a calligrapher has a wide variety of tools from which to choose, from traditional to completely modern, even digital! Calligraphers can now experiment with their artistic expression, freely mixing creative ideas and elements together to explore new artforms with their projects. In this book we'll examine the basic techniques of calligraphy, covering calligraphy hands suitable for a wide variety of projects and easy for a beginner or intermediate calligrapher to practice and learn. We'll also cover easy decorative techniques such as watercolor painting, Celtic knotwork, gold leafing and illustration ideas to create a "toolkit" of creative techniques. You'll learn how to make your own wedding stationery, create a painted greeting card or a birth announcement, design a logo for your own business, and so much more! We'll cover all the steps from basic layout to design choices to the final completed piece in easy step-by-step examples.

Calligraphy is a way of expressing yourself and learning something new in an art field that has lots of potential for new discoveries—finding new ways to embellish your lettering, learning a new alphabet, or creating memorable keepsakes with a handmade touch for yourself, family and friends.

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# Glossary of Terms

## Ascenders & Descenders

A letter has three main parts: the x-height, the ascender, and the descender. The main body of the letter fills the x-height (for example, the lowercase “o”); the ascender rises up above the x-height (the stem of the “d”); and the descender falls below the x-height (the stem on the lowercase “p”).

## Font

A typeface (alphabet) used on a computer (as opposed to letters used on a printing press, or hand written).

## Font Family

A font family includes a number of related font faces, such as a bold version, condensed, italic, light, etc.

## Cursive

A more fluid or script style of writing, developed as a faster way to write by monks. Cursive usually has a looser and less formal look. It’s useful for projects that need letters that flow and move in the design without looking too formal or stiff.

## Majuscule

Capital or uppercase letters in an alphabet. Also great for creating a splash at the beginning of a text with a larger or more detailed letter. Often used for monograms, or a detailed piece in stand-alone uses where there may not be any other text or designs in a project. A highly decorated Majuscule used at the beginning of a word or sentence is called a “Display Capital.”

## Minuscule

Lowercase letters in an alphabet. Some minuscule letters lend an informal look to a piece of text, and can be used in projects where a lighter or more inviting feel is desired.

## Uncial

A style of writing characterized by full, rounded letters. Capitals from our modern Latin alphabet are derived from Uncial style letterforms.

## **Serif**

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A small stroke at the beginning or end of a main stroke. A serif can be made in many ways and often gives a particular alphabet its characteristic look.

## **Glyph**

Any graphic within a font. This can be a letter, number, or a symbol such as a dollar sign or punctuation.

## **Encoding**

Each glyph is encoded with instructions so that the computer knows to type an “A” when you press the “A” key on your keyboard. At one time Macs and PCs used different encoding instructions or standards; however the new Unicode Standard is a universal standard that both Macs and PCs will recognize and understand and what we’ll be using in our discussions here.

## **Metrics**

Spacing rules that you want your font letters to follow so that they’re spaced correctly when you type words and paragraphs.

## **Color Hue/Tint/Shade**

Hue is pure color. Tint is color plus white. Shade is color plus black.

## **Complementary Colors**

Colors opposite each other on the color wheel. Complementaries can create strong and bold color pairings.

## **Triad Colors**

Three colors, each one-third away from each other on the color wheel. Triads can also create a very bold color combination.

## **Split Complementary Colors**

Instead of using the direct complementary color, you use the two colors to either side of the complementary. This combination is more subtle, and good for more reserved pieces.

## **Gilding**

The application of tissue-thin sheets of metal (gold, silver, copper) to a sticky surface.

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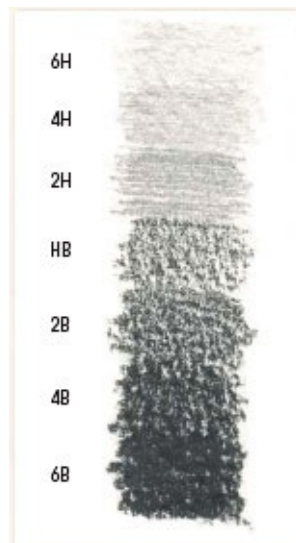
## CHAPTER 1

# Calligraphy Tools and Supplies

*Calligraphy is not an expensive craft to learn. With some basic pen supplies and papers you can immediately begin learning how to create beautiful letters.*

## Sketching Tools

To sketch your designs and plan your layout you'll need a pencil or two and a good eraser. These actually come in a much wider variety than what we've all used in grade school! Having a few choices in pencil leads and a good eraser to use can mean the difference between fighting your materials while you work, and getting into the groove of your project, so it's more than worth the small cost to purchase these.



## PENCIL HARDNESS

*Pencils come in different hardnesses of lead, from 6B (which draws very soft, smudgy black lines) to 6H (which draws hard, thin, silvery lines). For calligraphy or for sketches that will be colored over, buying a normal HB pencil and a 2B or 2H will suffice.*





## TYPES OF PENCILS

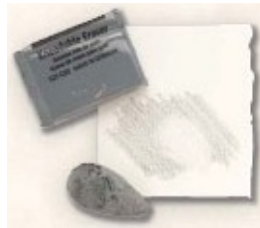
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*You can buy your pencils as normal pencils that are sharpened with a pencil sharpener, a holder that can accept leads of any hardness, or a mechanical pencil. I prefer to work with mechanical pencils because they don't have to be sharpened. I buy a few of those brightly colored plastic mechanical pencils in different colors and color-code what pencil holds which hardness of lead.*



## VINYL ERASERS

*Vinyl erasers are a standard for sketching. They come in a variety of sizes, however I find the easiest thing to do is buy a big block and then use a utility knife to cut it down to whatever size I need. I also trim off the corners of the rectangular eraser into small wedges that I use to erase in tiny places—very handy for detail work when drawing embellishments and designs!*



## KNEADABLE ERASERS

*Although a kneadable eraser is sold in a rectangular form, you can knead it into any shape you want! Rather than rubbing it across your work like a normal eraser, press it against your pencil lines, then lift it off. Since it only removes a bit of the drawn lines at a time you have a lot of control with how much you lighten or remove. It's also great for sensitive papers because it gently removes the pencil lines on delicate papers that could be abraded or ruined by rubbing.*

## Calligraphy Pens

Calligraphy can be written with any wide chisel-shaped tool, whether it's a pen, a felt, or the reed from a musical instrument! The key is the chisel-shaped edge used to make the letters. By holding the chisel edge at a consistent angle and moving it around your paper, it will create thin and thick lines automatically for you.

The three main types of pens used in calligraphy are the traditional dip pen, a cartridge style pen, and a felt tip pen. Try each to see what you're most comfortable with across a variety of uses. For practicing and planning pieces it's handy to whip out some text with a felt pen, while expressive works and works needing a wide range of nib widths would work better with a dip style pen. A cartridge style pen is handy for long pieces of text that need consistent letters because you just load it up and start writing!

Each is useful in its own way, but if you can only buy one style, I would recommend buying the dip pen holder and some nibs and ink because it's the most flexible to work with overall. Once you become more familiar with calligraphy, experiment with any chisel shaped objects you can find!



## FELT TIP PENS

*The felt tip pen is like an ordinary felt pen, except that the tip has a wide chisel edge, not a point. A great tool for beginners, these pens are inexpensive, do not require reloading or filling with ink, and come in a variety of colors and widths. However, because the tip is made from felt, it can wear down and soften over time and you'll lose your nice crisp edge for lettering. Also, the ink isn't archival so it's not suitable for important projects*



## CARTRIDGE STYLE PENS

*The cartridge style pen works like a fountain pen, except that it has a chisel nib for making calligraphic letters. To use these, you insert ink cartridges into the pen and add your preferred nib. Inks come in a variety of colors, and nibs in a variety of widths.*

*These pens are nice for students because you get an automatic flow of ink as you write, and you can write for a very long time without having to change ink cartridges. However, it can be tedious to change colors or nib widths because the ink chamber and nib must be thoroughly cleaned and flushed free of any ink that could dry inside.*



## Calligraphy Pens



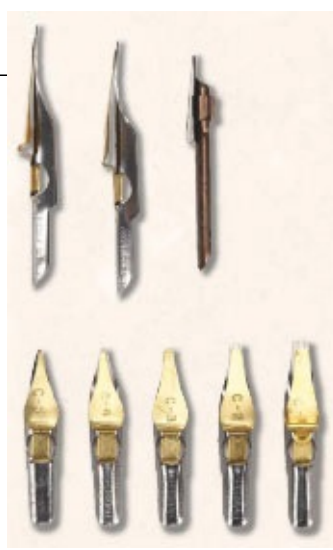
### DIP STYLE PENS

*A dip style pen, the kind you see in old movies that is usually associated with calligraphy, has a handle with a small opening at one end where the calligraphy pen nib is inserted. It's very simple to change nib widths and colors because the nib is accessible and easy to clean. However it does take a bit of practice to figure out how much ink to load into the nib, and to gauge when you're going to run out and need to redip.*

### DIP STYLE NIBS

*Dip style nibs of any brand have common features. They each have a shaft that fits into the pen holder, the main part of the nib head that has the ink reservoir, and the chisel tip. The chisel tip can be purchased in a wide variety of widths, depending on the kind of letters you'll be making and how big they'll be. Most nibs have the ink reservoir already attached, however some brands, such as the Mitchell nibs, have a small separate piece that slides on to the nib to create the reservoir.*





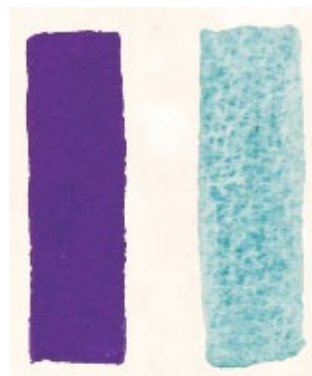
## Nib Care

Before using your nibs for the first time, you'll need to clean the manufacturer's grease and varnish from them for the ink to flow properly. You can do this by holding the nib tip in a cup of boiling water for a short time and then wiping it dry, or you can add a few drops of gum arabic to the nib and then wipe it off; no need to rinse.

In between colors or after use, your nib should be thoroughly cleaned with an old toothbrush and soapy water, and patted dry. It's especially important not to let waterproof ink dry on your nibs or they'll be very difficult to clean or use.

## Inks

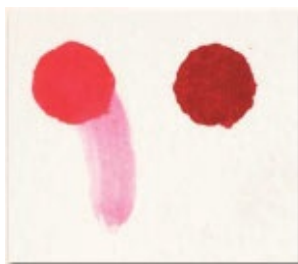
A dip style calligraphy pen can be used with a number of liquid mediums, however most commonly you'll be looking for ink. Ink can be sold by the stick or bottle, and in any color of the rainbow! What ink you choose depends on your project and on what you find works best for how you like to work.



### PIGMENTED INKS VS. DYES

*Inks can be made from pigments, or dyes. Pigments can make the ink feel a little grainy when you write with it because it's an ink made up of tiny particles that give the ink its color. It can*

*also settle out both in the jar (always make sure you shake well!) and on the page, which can give interesting effects if you use a textured paper. Dye-based inks are not lightfast, so will fade over time.*



## **PAINTS AS INKS**

*You can also use watercolor, gouache or liquid acrylic with your dip pens (use artist-quality or student-grade to ensure strong colors and ease of workability). Each comes in a wide array of colors and opacities, and needs to be thinned before use with your pen. Use a paintbrush to fill the reservoir of your dip pen nib with paint. When using acrylic, always wash your dip pen nib thoroughly after use, or even during use, as the paint dries quickly and can clog your pen.*



## **WATERPROOF OR WATER SOLUBLE?**

*Whether you choose to work in waterproof or water-soluble ink depends on your project.*

*Water-soluble inks can be good for practice work because you don't have to be as careful about the ink drying on the pen nib, and it's easier to clean up and change colors. Waterproof inks are hard to clean off your nib if left to dry, so are best used for finished work where you need the ink to stay in place no matter what.*



## INK STICKS

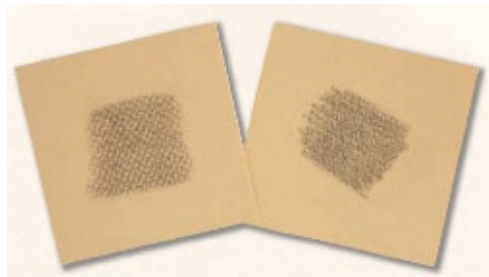
*Ink sold in stick form must be liquified before use. This is done against a special stone that has a well in the center. The well is filled partway with water, and the ink stick is lightly rubbed against the stone into the water until the fresh ink has the consistency desired.*

## Cartridge Pen Inks

The ink sold for cartridge style pens is water soluble so it doesn't dry up in the pen and ruin it. Also, because of the fine mechanism within a cartridge style pen that allows the ink to flow, the cartridges contain a dye based ink which can fade. Choose black if you need the letters to last for a long time as the bright colors are the worst offenders for fading!

## Papers

There are numerous options of suitable papers to use for calligraphy, depending on your project, personal preference, and budget. The paper you choose can add character or even color to your piece, and can be a source of inspiration for future projects.



## WATERCOLOR PAPER

*Watercolor paper comes in different finishes: very smooth (called smooth, or hot press), a medium texture (cold press), or very textured (rough). If your project involves a lot of fine detail and very small lettering, you may want to choose a smoother paper so you're not fighting the texture while adding your details. Textured paper, however, can give wonderful irregular edges to larger letters!*



## CALLIGRAPHY PAPER PADS

*Paper specifically for calligraphy can be purchased in convenient pads. These are wonderful for practicing on because you have a large number of sheets to work with and they come in a number of different sized pads depending on how big you like to work. As a rule, try to buy a larger pad for practice: 11 x 14 inches (28 x 36cm) or even 16 x 20 inches (41 x 51cm). You'll be able to make nice, large, comfortable strokes as you feel your way around the letters.*



## PASTEL PAPER

*Pastel paper is a light paper that's offered in a wide array of colors. It usually has a smoother side and a textured side, so it's easy to test both and decide which you prefer for your project.*



## REAL VELLUM

*Although a little more costly, real vellum or parchment is a true delight to work with. Made from real calf or deer skin, the translucent nature of the surface makes the letters and colors seem to float above it. There are still a few sources that sell sheets or even full skins of prepared vellum—try a simple search on the Internet.*



## HANDMADE PAPERS

*Before choosing a handmade paper, always be sure to test it with the style of pen and type of ink you plan to use to make sure the paper reacts properly—some work wonderfully, while others are soft enough to make the ink bleed or clog your pen.*



## Other Supplies

Basic tools aside, there are a few additional supplies that can be bought if you're really enjoying yourself and want to take your calligraphy further. These items can make it a bit easier to work on larger or more involved projects.

## GRAPHITE TRANSFER PAPER

*Graphite paper is one of my favorite time savers! It allows you to trace a design and transfer it to a new sheet of paper. Because it's made with graphite like your pencil, it's fairly erasable, and each sheet is reusable for quite a long time. To use it:*

- 1. Place your good paper on the bottom, a sheet of graphite paper (graphite side down) on top of that, and your original sketch on the top (see photo below).*
- 2. Tape the sketch and graphite layers to the bottom good paper with low tack tape or drafting tape.*
- 3. Use a blue or red medium ballpoint pen to trace over your sketch lines (the color makes it easier to see where you've traced already).*
- 4. Untape your "transfer sandwich" and your sketch should now be ready to ink and paint!*

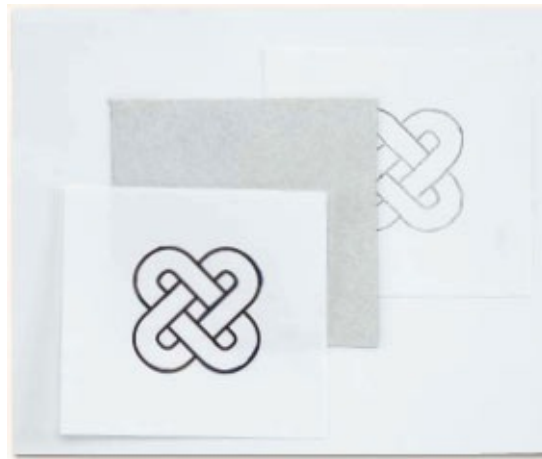


*When tracing your sketch onto your good paper, trace just a few lines, then very carefully lift a corner to make sure that it's transferring properly. There's nothing more frustrating than tracing out an entire design only to discover that you had your graphite paper facing the wrong way and nothing transferred! It's also a good way to make sure you 're pressing hard enough to transfer the design, but not so hard that you 're leaving grooves in the paper.*



## **ANGLED BOARD**

*If you're doing a lot of calligraphy, having an angled board can save your posture! You can purchase a board in plastic, Masonite or wood, or you can easily build your own. Either way, try to get a board that's adjustable so you can change the angle depending on your project or preference.*



## **Using a Light Box**

A light box helps with tracing and layout. You can rule a bunch of lines for your lettering and place that sheet underneath your good paper as you work so the lines show through without having to draw them on your good paper. You can also assemble many pieces, almost like a collage, lay your good paper on top and then trace the elements that you want to keep onto your good paper. You can buy light boxes, or make your own from a shallow box with a glass top, inserting a long fluorescent lightbulb or two inside. Any large window can also work as a light box.

## **Adding Color**

In addition to the basic supplies, there are a number of fun things that you can use to embellish and add color to your calligraphy projects. We'll cover how to use these different tools more extensively in upcoming chapters.

## ADDING COLOR WITH PAINT

*Not only can watercolors, gouache and liquid acrylics be used as ink, you can use paint to make large colored washes on your background or to add small colored details (you'll want to use artist's quality or student grade paints to ensure strong color and ease of use).*

*You'll also need a small selection of brushes. I recommend good-quality synthetic brushes in size nos. 0, 2 and 6 to start with. I also use a palette for mixing colors.*



## ADDING COLOR WITH COLORED PENCILS

*Colored pencils can be used to shade in color, draw colored lines, and add fine hairline details in your work. Choose as high a quality pencil as you can afford; better quality gives you a deeper color range and stronger leads and light-fastness. Colored pencils are available in packs or as singles so you can pick the exact shade you want for a project.*



## WATERCOLOR PENCILS

*These are fantastic! If you're worried that watercolors are too tricky to use, then you might want to try watercolor pencils (also known as "water-soluble colored pencils"). These are used much like standard colored pencils, but after you've shaded in an area, take a wet paintbrush and run it over your shading. The water will actually liquify the pencil marks and give it a watercolor appearance. It's a great way to get a watercolor effect, but with more control.*



## **PIGMENTED PENS**

*I use pigmented pens for all my outlining. As opposed to a regular black ink pen, these are made with a quality pigmented ink that won't fade, is waterproof, and archival. When you're working on a special project and putting that much work into it, you want to use materials that are made to last. Poor quality inks can fade over time, or cause the paper around the ink line to age and make your nice crisp black lines have dirty yellow halos in as little as a few years!*



## **METALLIC AND GEL PENS**

*Metallic pens can be found in either gel form, or a xylene base (the xylene ones smell and need to be shaken to work as they have a ball inside that keeps the metallic particles from clogging). You can also find gel pens that come in opaque colors and a number of sparkly metallic shades. None of these pens are archival, and so are not appropriate for fine works you wish to be permanent. For a really good project it's better to use a fine brush and metallic gouache for some shimmer, or to gild the area with gold leaf if you want a lot of shine. However, for fun projects that aren't meant to last for a long time, metallic and gel pens offer a quick way to add details and shimmer to your work!*

## **List of Supplies**

### **CALLIGRAPHY PENS**

*Dip pens and nibs*

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*Cartridge pens*

*Felt-tip pens*

## **INKS & PAINTS**

*Pigmented inks*

*Dye-based inks*

*Water-soluble ink*

*Waterproof ink*

*Ink cartridges*

*Ink sticks*

*Watercolor paints (tubes or pans)*

*Liquid acrylic paints*

## **PENS AND PENCILS**

*Pigmented pens*

*Metallic pens*

*Gel pens*

*Colored pencils*

*Watercolor pencils*

*Sketching pencils in HB, 2B, 2H*

## **BRUSHES**

*nos. 0, 2, 6 watercolor brushes*

*no. 0 or 2 round nylon brush*

## **PAPERS**

*Calligraphy paper pads*

*Watercolor paper*

*Pastel paper Vellum and parchment*

*Handmade papers*

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

*Watercolor palette*

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*Vinyl and kneadable erasers*

*Graphite transfer paper*

*Angled workboard*

*Light box*

*Gold leaf and adhesive size*

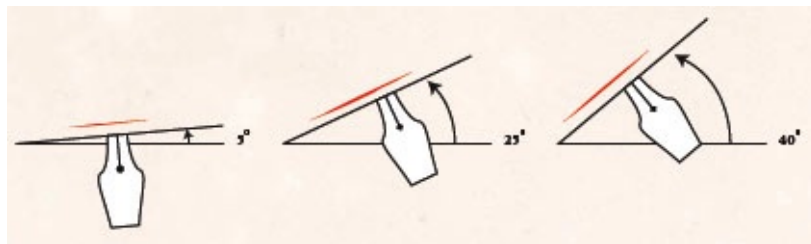
## CHAPTER 2

# How to Make Calligraphy Strokes

*Many strokes and shapes of letters are similar between alphabets. Keep practicing these stroke exercises and each letterform will become easier and faster to do as your hand gets used to these new movements.*

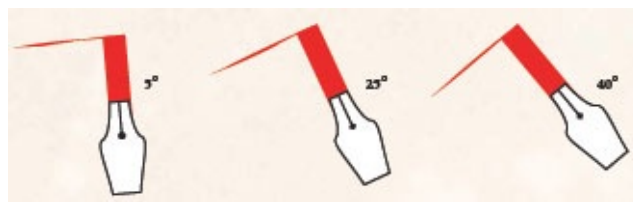
## Pen Angle

Every calligraphy hand (or alphabet) is written with the pen nib held at a specific angle. By consistently holding the pen at this angle, the chiseled pen nib will automatically create thick and thin places on each letter, which will give the letter its characteristic look.



## THIN LINES

*Hold the pen nib at the given angle and slide it sideways along the thin nib edge.*



## THICK LINES

*Thick lines are drawn using the full width of the nib. Try not to rock the pen nib from side to side or it will make irregular edges on your stroke. Keep the nib edge flat on the paper as you write to make a smooth even line.*

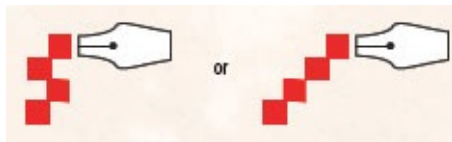


## CURVES

*Curved lines are also drawn using the full width of the nib. Try to hold the actual pen nib at the same angle and it will make the thick-to-thin changes for you automatically.*

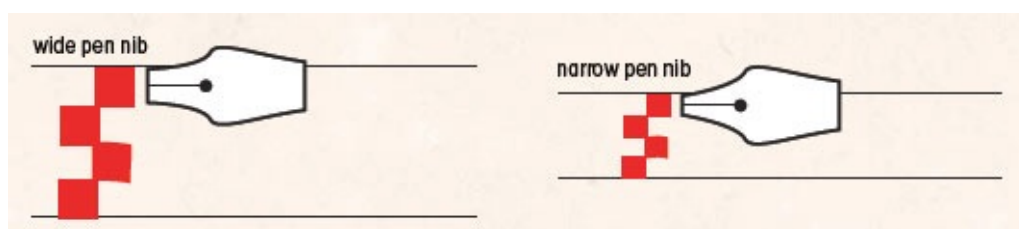
## Nib Width

Every alphabet has a standard height that it's usually written at, based on the width of the nib used to write it. This is called its "nib width." When you're learning a new letterform you'll be given its nib width, as well as the pen angle, as a kind of formula or guide to writing the letters.



## MAKE A LADDER

*Once you have the nib width, hold your pen nib horizontally and make a series of squares, each offset from the next or stacked in a row. This is called a "ladder." Each square will be exactly the width of your pen nib, hence the name "nib width." Make as many squares or nib widths as you were given for the letterform you're writing.*



## DRAW GUIDELINES

*With your nib widths established, use the ladder to draw the writing lines on your page. This ensures that your letters will be the correct proportional height for the letter style and the pen nib you've chosen to write with, regardless of how tiny or enormous your letters are!*



GOTHIC nib width: 5

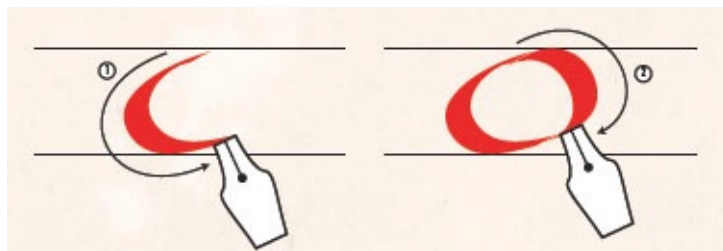
ascender/descender nib width: 7 pen angle: 45°

## ASCENDERS AND DESCENDERS

A letter has three main parts: the *x*-height, ascender, and descender. The main body of the letter fills the *x*-height (for example the lowercase “o”); the ascender rises up above the *x*-height (the stem of the “d”); and the descender falls below the *x*-height (the stem on the lowercase “p”).

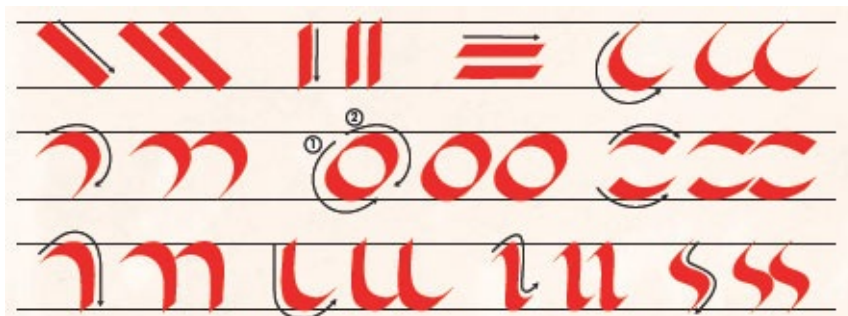
## Building Strokes

Each letter in any letterform is made up of a series of strokes. The strokes may be straight or curved, and are usually drawn in a particular order so each subsequent stroke can be landmarked off of the preceding stroke.



## STROKE ORDER

When following the examples in this book, draw your letters using the numbered arrows as construction guides. Starting at arrow no. 1, draw the stroke as shown from start to finish. Then draw arrow no. 2, and so on.



## PRACTICE STROKES

There are a number of basic strokes and shapes that make up most letters. These can be used to practice your pen control and also make a great warm-up when you first sit down to a calligraphy session! Unless you’re practicing a particular letter style, you don’t need to worry about which nib width or angle to use.

## Letter Construction In Depth

Let’s begin with some “Uncials” to practice our strokes and to see in-depth how a letter comes together. We will examine more alphabets and additional letters in the next chapter, but let’s take a few sample letters here and really break it down.



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